

VZCZCXRO7134  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHKUK RUEHROV  
DE RUEHRH #1981/01 2681358  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
P 251358Z SEP 07  
FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6578  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 9061  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 001981

SIPDIS

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

DEPT PLEASE PASS TO NEA/ARP FOR BJACHIM/SRAMESH AND NEA/PPD  
FOR WDOUGLAS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/22/2027

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [KTFN](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: PROMINENT SAUDI SCHOLAR PUBLICLY CRITICIZES BIN  
LADEN, AL-QA'IDA

REF: A. RIYADH 01894 B. RIYADH 08825

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission David Rundell for reasons  
1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (U) On the sixth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, Saudi Arabian Sheikh Salman bin Fahd al-Awdah posted a letter on his popular internet website, [www.islamtoday.com](http://www.islamtoday.com), strongly criticizing Al-Qa'ida for its militant ideology and targeting of innocent civilians. In the letter, which received a great deal of coverage in the press and was widely discussed throughout the Arab world, al-Awdah posed several pointed questions to Bin Laden and accused him of "forever tarnishing the image of Islam." Al-Awdah rebuked Bin Laden for breeding "a new type of violence, radicalism, and fundamentalism" and said that attacks carried out in Morocco, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia in the name of Al-Qa'ida only serve to upset Muslim societies in those countries. He questioned Bin Laden's motives by pointing out that the 9/11 attacks made Bin Laden famous but did little to further the cause of Islam. Al-Awdah also attributed to Bin Laden the increasing number of young Muslim men in prison, the growing and unprecedented level of suspicion toward Islamic charities, and the sullied image of Islam and Muslims worldwide.

¶2. (S/NF) Al-Awdah is a former professor who participated in the "As-Sahwa al-Islamiya," or Islamic Awakening reform movement, which was prominent in the early 1990s and directed against the Saudi Royal Family for their support to the U. S. during the Gulf War (ref A). Since being released from prison in 1999, al-Awdah has built a large following amongst Saudis and abroad, advocating a moderate, balanced interpretation of Islam. He is widely known and respected for his public statements against violence in the name of Islam.

¶3. (U) Public reaction to al-Awdah's letter was mixed. In a running dialogue in internet chat rooms and on news sites, some welcomed al-Awdah's remarks, while others labeled him a stooge of the SAG. "May God blacken your face, you scholars of rulers. May God protect Osama Bin Laden," wrote one author on the website [www.jaralqamr.com](http://www.jaralqamr.com). Several write-ins praised al-Awdah for striking a major blow to Al-Qa'ida, while others lamented the letter and charged that al-Awdah had misjudged Bin Laden and lost his way. "Al-Awdah himself needs advice. We hope that God will bring him back to the truth," noted one individual on [www.aljazeeraatalk.net](http://www.aljazeeraatalk.net).

14. (C) Several of Post's Saudi contacts said they agree with al-Awdah's remarks in the letter and they praised the scholar for his candid assessment of the damage Bin Laden and Al-Qa'ida have caused to Islam and the societies where Al-Qa'ida has carried out attacks. Some of Post's Saudi academic contacts pointed out that Bin Laden and the extremists are quickly losing their appeal in Saudi Arabia as citizens try to meet the demands of their everyday lives. The fallout from the crash of the Saudi stock market in 2006 and the rising costs of foodstuffs are a constant distraction for Saudis, they said, leaving people little opportunity to fall prey to the jihadist ideology of Al-Qa'ida. In the end, suggested these Saudis, the letter will neither hurt nor help al-Awdah. They pointed out that, while he may lose the support of some extremists, the vast majority of the Saudi population appears to support him in this instance.

15. (S/NF) COMMENT: Al-Awdah is a prominent fixture in Saudi society and even has a weekly television program that has become a staple in many Saudi homes. Described as "charismatic" and a talented orator, he is said to have a unique ability to preach moderation and advocate for the advancement of Muslim society using passages from the Qu'ran and renowned Islamic texts. Al-Awdah speaks the language of the conservatives -- but also provides an alternative interpretation of these texts in a way that appeals to both conservatives and moderates. While al-Awdah might not be "pro-U.S.," he is clearly not a supporter of Bin Laden or militant ideologies. The fact that al-Awdah can publicly criticize Bin Laden and Al-Qa'ida and still maintain his credibility with the conservative Saudi public is testament to his wide network of supporters in the Kingdom. END COMMENT.

RIYADH 00001981 002 OF 002

FRAKER